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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DAKAR 001365

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, PARIS FOR DEA

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TAGS: [KOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PU](#) [XY](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU: DISSIDENT SOLDIERS ATTACK
PRESIDENT'S HOME

REF: A. DAKAR 1357
[B](#). DAKAR 1324
[C](#). DAKAR 960

Classified By: DCM JAY T. SMITH FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: In the early morning hours of November 23, at least nine dissident soldiers fired on the private residence of Bissau-Guinean President Joao Bernardo Vieira. Forces loyal to Vieira returned fire, prompting a three-hour gun battle. The President and his family were unharmed. Initial reports suggest that former President Kumba Yala, exiled former Navy Chief-of-Staff Bubo Na Tchuto, and former Interior Minister Ernesto de Carvalho may have been the masterminds of the attempted coup. Military leadership,s role in the attack and the possibility of future violence remain unclear. END SUMMARY.

FIREFIGHT AT THE PRESIDENT,S RESIDENCE

[2](#). (C) At approximately 12:00 am on November 23, a group of at least nine low-ranking dissident officers opened fire on President Vieira,s private residence. According to the Ministry of Interior, the mutineers were predominately from the Balanta ethnic group, with loose ties to the Party for Social Renewal (PRS), a pro-Balanta political party headed by former President Kumba Yala. Over the course of the battle, at least one person was killed and several injured, including the Chief-of-Staff of President,s security detail. (Note: Reports conflict as to whether the fatality was among the President,s guards or among the mutineers.) The dissident soldiers eventually fled when reinforcements finally arrived at the scene, two hours after the fighting began.

[3](#). (S) The reasons for the delayed arrival of reinforcements remain unclear. Preliminary conversations with the United Nations Secretary General,s Representative to Guinea-Bissau, Shola Omoregie, suggested that Armed Forces Chief-of-Staff General Tagme Na Wai could not be reached by telephone when the fighting erupted, perhaps because he was ill. In the afternoon of November 23, General Na Wai publicly dismissed the possibility that the Armed Forces, himself included, were more broadly involved, noting that if he had been involved, the attempted coup would have been successful. COMMENT: Whatever the cause, the two-hour delay in deploying reinforcements suggests either incompetence, a tactical hedging-of-bets, or at worst, complicity in the attack. The armed force,s apparent lack of responsiveness and commitment to protect the President has led Vieira and other observers, including POLCOUNS who traveled to Bissau on November 24, to conclude that perhaps the violence is not yet over. END COMMENT.

THE AFTERMATH

14. (C) Later in the morning of November 23, Vieira opened his residence to journalists and international observers, who reported extensive damage to the master bedroom and bathroom.

The President's vehicles, parked in front of the residence, were also destroyed. According to media reports, spent shell casings were present in the floor of the master bedroom, suggesting that the insurgents penetrated the inner chambers of the residence. In a telephone conversation with Ambassador Bernicat on November 24, Vieira sounded troubled and suggested that he had not yet left his damaged residence.

Omoregie later confirmed on November 24 that Vieira was still being guarded at his residence and that the President had not yet ventured out. In the evening of November 23, Vieira addressed the country on national television, urging residents to remain calm.

15. (C) By November 24, according to Ministry of Interior sources, security forces had arrested six of the mutineers, while at least four others, including the insurgent leader, remained at large. Those arrested were being held at an undisclosed military facility. Security forces closed the borders in hopes of apprehending the remaining insurgents. In a November 24 meeting with Attorney General Luis Manuel Cabral, General Na Wai reportedly refused to hand the detainees over to civilian authorities. Post has been unable to confirm media reports linking the suspected leader of the insurgents, navy sergeant Alexandre Tchama Yala, to Kumba Yala.

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LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL REACTION

16. (SBU) On the afternoon of November 23, representatives from all the Bissau-Guinean political parties, with the notable exception of PRS, issued a joint statement condemning the attack and pledging their support for President Vieira. Representatives from the European Union, the African Union, the Economic Community of West Africa, the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, and the United Nations all publicly condemned the violence. Post joined the embassies of Canada and Japan in a joint statement calling on all parties to renounce violence. On the evening of November 23, in a show of support for Vieira, thousands of Bissau residents took to the streets to condemn the violence. Another mass demonstration occurred November 25.

THE SUSPECTED MASTERMINDS

17. (C) According to Ministry of Interior sources, the captured mutineers have all implicated three civilians as the instigators of the attack: former President Kumba Yala, exiled former Navy Chief-of-Staff Bubo Na Tchuto, and former Interior Minister Ernesto de Carvalho. According to the Ministry of Interior, on the evening of the attack, Yala was at the home of Carvalho. Na Tchuto is believed to still be residing in the Gambia, where he fled following what was described as an attempted coup in August, 2008. (Ref C)

18. (C) In the run-up to the November 16 legislative elections, Yala repeated accused Vieira of being Guinea-Bissau's principle drug trafficker and the single greatest source of the problem of narcotics trafficking in the country. In response, Vieira sued Yala in the local courts for defamation. On November 21, hours after the National Electoral Commission (CNE) announced the preliminary results of the November 16 legislative elections, which saw the African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) capture a solid majority of 67 seats in

the 100-seat National Assembly, Yala attempted to drive from Bissau to Dakar. Security officials stopped Yala at the Senegalese border and prevented him from leaving, citing that Yala was the defendant in an ongoing civil suit, and that he was also under investigation for connections to narcotics trafficking. Border officials confiscated Yala's passport and ordered his return to Bissau. PRS officials vigorously protested the actions against their president and vowed a firm response.

¶9. (C) On November 17, as the news of the landslide PAIGC victory was emerging, Yala publicly declared that he would not respect any election result that did not give PRS a majority in the National Assembly. Yala claimed that votes in the PRS strongholds in the north of the country were not properly counted. Over 150 international election observers, including a team of three EmbOffs, witnessed no serious irregularities. (Ref. A) Sources indicated that Yala was attempting to extort money from the international community, offering to accept the election results in exchange for payments. On November 19, Zubaida Rasul, Senior Political Affairs Officer in the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), confirmed that Omoregie had met with Yala and that money was discussed.

¶10. (C) Carvalho, a member of the PRS, served as Minister of Interior in 2006-2007 as part of the government of national unity. He resigned amid charges of corruption, and was implicated in a corruption scandal in Brazil. (Septel to follow). Conventional wisdom on the streets of Bissau held that Carvalho was heavily involved in narcotics trafficking. Former Navy Chief-of-Staff Na Tchuto fled to the Gambia in August following allegations of his involvement in an aborted coup attempt. Na Tchuto, who enjoyed an opulent lifestyle, also was a reputed leader of the narcotics trade in Guinea-Bissau.

¶11. (S) COMMENT: Yala, Na Tchuto, and Carvalho have a long history of criminal irresponsibility. Their status as the usual suspects makes them easy targets as scapegoats. However, it is equally plausible that their union, and that of the military dissidents, represents a convergence of mutual interests. Yala and Na Tchuto, both Balanta, can readily appeal to a Balanta-dominated military weary of PAIGC-backed security sector reform. (Ref. B) As evidenced by his suspect conversion to Islam, Yala apparently longs to return to the Presidency, while Na Tchuto and Carvalho

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plausibly would welcome a return to their lucrative positions at the top of the narcotics trade.

¶12. (S) What remains, unclear, however, is the motivation of General Na Wai, a Balanta leery of security sector reform, and his commitment to protecting Vieira and the constitution.

It is difficult to believe that a handful of low-grade officers thought they could assassinate Vieira and install a new president, without the assurance that military accomplices subsequently would seize control of the apparatus of state power: the military, communications, transportation and key government buildings. The possibility of broader military involvement renders the two-hour delay in responding to the attack suspicious. Furthermore, the possibility of high-level military involvement increases the probability that another coup attempt may be forthcoming. If violence persists, it will be difficult not to conclude that Na Wai is at least tacitly complicit. END COMMENT.

BERNICAT